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Mott - An Epistle to Friends - 1828

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AN

EPISTLE

TO

FRIENDS

WITHIN THE COMPASS

OF

Philadelphia

YEARLY MEETING,

BY

JOHN MOTT.

PHILADELPHIA.
Printed on the Vertical Press, by D. & S. Neall,
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The following Epistle was written by John Mott shortly after his return from a religious visit, which he not long since paid to Friends of these parts, and further south, and was sent to some of his particular friends, who thought that the excellent counsel and sound instruction which it contains, rendered a more extended circulation of it desirable, than it would be likely to obtain in a manuscript form.

Philadelphia, 4th. Month, 1828.

AN EPISTLE &c.

My beloved Friends,

Since my return home, almost as often as I get into stillness, peace and quietude pervade my mind, and a testimony arises in my heart to the faithfulness of Him who cannot lie, and who said, and it stands good for ever, "My covenant I will not break." He spake in vision to my soul, that if I should be faithful in a little service, due to the church in your land, my outward dwelling might be a peaceful retreat for a season.

My soul is often filled with gratitude, in remembrance of the high favour bestowed upon you, in opening a way for his people, so that they have not been scattered abroad. And great will be the unfaithfulness and consequent condemnation of this generation, if under all the blessings and favours of a gracious Providence, the work of reformation should not be carried forward. For every age hath its allotted portion of work, in promoting the gradual advancement of the church of Christ, to a state recognised by the Psalmist, when he said, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

It is very evident that the church much needs purification, not only from many vain and foolish customs, and inconsistent practices, but also from the corrupt doctrines of antichrist; though which the kingdom of the beast and the false prophet is much enlarged, by substituting the wisdom, devices, and doctrines of men, for the pure, simple, unflattering, and experimental doctrines of eternal truth. "Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth with-

out measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, shall descend into it." These uncertain, confused notions of men, that they call religion, is Gomorrah the empire of desolation, Babel the seat of confusion. And surely it is cause of deep gratitude, that, at such a time, the Father of mercies is about to "turn to the people a pure language," uncorrupted by prejudice and tradition. This language of Zion is experimental religion, which no member of the true church can misunderstand. And would people be content with their own living experiences, without imposing their opinions on others, contention about religion would cease, and christianity would no longer be a reproach among the nations. For in the same proportion that the sincere, seeking mind is drawn from outward dependences, there is a gathering to the true Shiloah of God, where peace, love, and harmony grow beside those heavenly streams.

In this bond of christian fellowship the social feelings have their due exercise. Families, neighbourhoods, denominations of men, and the nations of the earth are all preserved by this salt of the covenant of peace. Canons and creeds are not much used in this "house of God." Envy, hatred, and pride clothe not upon its inhabitants. They are therefore not found sitting in the temple of God as arbiters of the consciences of their brethren.

Blessed be the name of the Lord of Sabaoth, that in every day and age, when persecution, in any of its various forms, has fallen upon the faithful, he hath opened unto these an access, and graciously encouraged them to appeal, from the partial, unfeeling tribunal of such as in their blind zeal go on judging and condemning, to a more merciful and impartial seat of judgment and justice, where purity of motive fails not to find acceptance. O! the purity of eternal justice and truth!—How impartial the distribution of its

crowns of peace, to all those, who, following Christ in the regeneration, are given to sit on thrones of righteous judgment, judging down sin and iniquity in themselves and others, leaving the Almighty to judge of the motives, opinions, or doctrines of such as do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.

When I have beheld the wonderful workings of Him who is infinite in wisdom, in overturning the pride, power, and policy of man,—in confounding the language of all Babel builders, in order that his own temple or empire of justice, peace, and love might be set over these, and established above the heights of all the mountains of highly professing Israel, my soul hath been bowed in awful supplication before him whose work it is, that he would still carry it on by his own eternal arm of power, to the effectual breaking down of every strong hold, to the humbling of every exalted feeling, and to the lifting up, in hope and confidence, the heads of his humbled, exercised, and baptized children.

"Where much is given, much is required." And if I am given to discern the signs of the times, a reformation is required of this generation from some of the mysterious doctrines of the darkness of man's fallen wisdom, by which many have been darkened by words without the true knowledge of God and of Christ; whom to know is life eternal: to know him experimentally, by putting on the divine nature, and not by a mere blind assent to such doctrines as their fathers have taught them. And much is it to be lamented, that there should be found among the sons and daughters of our enlightened day, so many who prefer contending about the husk to the possession of the kernel; who had rather be making creeds and doctrines than living lives of humility and self-denial, in conformity to the example and precepts of Jesus; who by a sinless life, through all the

trials and temptations to which he was incident, condemned sin in the flesh, and established a living testimony of everlasting encouragement to generations to come, thereby showing, that man is not only made perfect, but enabled through obedience so to live. Nor could a greater testimony be produced by a manifestation in the flesh, than that which was given to the world by the undefiled life of Jesus, enforced by the pure precepts of Christ through that outward manifestation.

God is one, and of one mind toward the whole human family. And he who cannot give his glory to another, confers it on himself in every of his manifestations, whether in the inanimate or animated world, whether in the lofty mountain, the wide extended plain, the starry heavens, in the vast expanse of waters, or in the intellectual world of mind, made accountable to him because endowed with knowledge. In every of these manifestations of his wisdom and power, the glory still is his; he is the same unchangeable God, and turneth not away from one of the least of his children, however remotely situated in the dark parts of the earth, or however ignorant of what some call the doctrines of the christian religion. The great fundamental principles of eternal truth and righteousness being universally impressed, cannot be misunderstood by the sincere in heart. However diversified the human mind may be in sentimental things, so long as each comes up to the standard of that knowledge which God has given him, his notions of God, however erroneous, cannot be his condemnation, any more than the most consistent notions can become his justification, while living in actual disobedience to the measure of light given.

We have reason to believe, that the truths of the gospel which are and will be unfolded to this generation, will open the way for the gradual removal of the veil of prejudice,

bigotry, and superstition, which has so long continued to overspread the visible church, and that the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, will be not only in word but in deed, not only in faith but in practice, because this age seems loudly to be called on to come out of the religion of the head, to the religion of the heart, and by *a life of godliness* to acknowledge God come in the flesh.

We have a great deal of crying out in the assemblies, "Thou art Christ the son of the living God," by such as are virtually denying his name, and persecuting his people—much running from Jerusalem to Damascus with letters, and many excommunications from the synagogues. But to the praise of his name who remains to be gracious, his gathering arm of power hath been mercifully stretched over us, that we have not been scattered abroad; but rather, through all the accusations, denunciations, and persecutions of false brethren, and shaking of false heavens, have we been gathered, and I trust are still gathering to the peaceable standard of the Lamb. For this my spirit travails both by night and by day, at home and abroad.

"I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation." An evil root of unbelief is evidently growing in some, who have departed from the living God and followed their own spirits. Even after having witnessed the application of the live coal to purge their lips, for want of patiently abiding with the gift in its gradual operation and growth, they have made haste to be rich in works, and have imprudently declared the vision "before the son of man be risen." Instead of waiting to know all their works wrought in them, they have formed likenesses of things in heaven, and have clothed themselves with their own righteousness, instead of being clothed with the demonstration of the spirit and power of God. Testimonies

thus borne are a burthen to the living baptized members of the body.

I think I have seen the danger of a superficial ministry growing up among us at this time; partly for want of sufficient depth, in those who hear and judge, to distinguish between that which arises from the creaturely wisdom and will, nearly resembling the *life*, though dead, and that which arises from the life, under the crucifying power of the cross and much creaturely weakness. Hence those living offerings are very likely to be doubted and even rejected by the master builders in the outward court, while testimonies clothed with the excellency of man's wisdom, which the Lord abhors, and which are mere likenesses of heavenly things, are received as food convenient, because congenial with the dead spirits, dead faith, and perverted judgment of such as are living in that element from whence satan was seen to descend, in the deceiveableness of unrighteousness, and in the near resemblance of the coming of the son of man; which was declared to be as the lightning, illuminating in its travel, from one degree of heavenly mindedness to another, from the first mansion of his house, to the fullness of God upon the throne of his own righteous judgment in the soul.

As I passed along, I felt a strong current of love in my mind, toward those of my brethren called Orthodox, particularly in some places; fully believing there are divers of that number who will be gathered from among thorns into the heavenly garner. But I believe that in too many of their minds patience has not had its perfect work; for had this been the case, they would have waited to hear and weigh those doctrines, necessarily declared respecting the spiritual body and blood of Christ, and not have sat so soon in the seat of judgment.

Oh! how feelingly have I many times, as at the present, desired that all wisdom's children may gather home to the Zion of our God, peaceful Jerusalem, which is above all strife and contention. And you, my dearly beloved friends, whom I have lately visited in the love of Christ with the language of invitation to many of you, be willing, I once more entreat you, to come out of the vain customs of this age of liberty, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Be not afraid to examine for yourselves, nor in self-confidence be found leaning on your own understandings; but trust in the Lord, be humble, so will the Lord Almighty, whose blessing I fervently crave for you, condescend to teach you of his ways, and safely guide you by his counsel, which he will not withhold from the humble in heart. The same holy anointing, which teacheth all things needful to be known, which originally raised up and gathered us to be a peculiar people, because of the heavenly doctrines and peculiar testimonies committed unto us, and designed for the nations; the same divine power, and gathering arm of love, is now round about to gather the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah, inclining your minds, in your reflecting moments, and seasons of favour when his presence is near, to leave the light, shortlived pleasures, the indulgence of the senses, the gratification of the vain mind, to espouse the dignified cause of virtue and religion, and to offer yourselves as willing candidates in the Lord's cause; so that, in consequence of your morning hours having been devoted to his service, your evenings may be crowned with ripening fruits unto holiness, the gathering or end of which is everlasting life.

O my dear young friends!—brought livingly near to my best life at this time,—can the testimony of an unworthy one who has "obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful"—can

the testimony of such an one to his adorable goodness and long suffering, be gathered by you as fruits of unfeigned love, and as an encouragement to press forward. Many are the discouragements and trials attending the pathway of apprehended duty of some of your number. For this exercised, tribulated class my spirit feels a living travail, that you may be redeemed from every oppressive burden under which your minds may for a season labour, and under which the mournful language of your spirits may flow in a similar channel of feeling to that which attended the mind of a devoted servant, when, under the baptism of suffering and of refining, he exclaimed, "I shall go softly all my days, in the bitterness of my soul." Such were his feelings, and such are some of yours. But we learn from the sequel, that when this dispensation had effected the purpose for which it was sent, it was succeeded by another of life and favour, which enabled him to adopt this language, "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." He was here given to see, that although chastisements for the present are grievous, yet as they are patiently borne, and as the mind is rightly exercised under them, they contribute to deepen us in the root of religion, and eventually produce those fruits of righteousness, the effect of which is quietness and assurance for ever. Therefore "lift up thine head in hope, trust in the Lord, and do good while it is yet in the power of thine hand to do it;" and although thine enemies may for a season be strong, yet know that the Lord is near, "in the valley decision," to clothe the mind with such portions of strength and wisdom, as finally to give victory over every temptation, and every doubt and discouragement. Trust then, renewedly "trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou be delivered from *all* thine enemies, and verily, thou shalt be fed."

Such is the language of my spirit to a tribulated number within your borders, to whom is the promise of Divine inspiration after this manner: "O thou afflicted, tossed with the tempest, and not comforted, behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders with pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near thee."

I am apprehensive, this salutation will not be fully received by all to whom it is sent, for there are some whom the discourager hath well nigh cast down. May these be wise and take heed; see that they cast not wholly away their confidence, which, if kept, hath a great recompense of reward. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation." Many too faithless ones there are, who in an hour of darkness lose patience, and cast away their shield of faith in his saving power, as though they had not been anointed with oil, and as though they had never known the Lord to be gracious. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Knowest thou not that that faith was given thee, to enable thee to surmount the waves, and that the casting of it from thee, is the only cause of thy sinking? Then have faith in God, and remember the counsel of experience, as a message from heaven to thy doubting soul—"Cast not away thy confidence, for therein is great recompense of reward." Therefore, "be not weary in well doing," which is to bear the turning of his hand without fainting, and to walk by faith without doubting, "for in due season," not in thine own time, but in his to whom the times and seasons are known, "thou shalt reap if thou faint not."

It is not of him that thou faintest. "The great God, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, nor is he weary, neither is there any searching of his understanding," by the feeble scan of mortal powers. What is it, then, that introduces the soul into doubt, but the impatience of the first birth, the undue exercise of the limited powers of reason on subjects which unlimited wisdom alone can solve. Come home then, thou wandering mind, wandering in the mazes of thine own clouded understanding, which thou hast too much leaned on. Be still and know that he is God, that he will teach his people himself, as never man taught, as all the powers of reason cannot teach. These cannot give godly patience, or inspire thy soul with godly hope and confidence, when clouds of darkness gather round thy dwelling. It is "the Lord alone that teacheth thee to profit, and leadeth thee in the way thou shouldst go." He teacheth silence, that all thy reasonings, doubtings, and self-accusations may be stilled before him. Wait in this pure silence until he himself speak to thy soul. Thus thou wilt learn that all his gifts and dispensations are designed for the perfecting of thy faith and patience, and for the purification of thy soul.

I now feel pretty much relieved from an exercise which introduced my spirit into a travail with the prisoners of hope, and can therefore take leave of you, beloved friends of this class, in the language of a prophet of God to his companions in tribulation, whose trials were great, but whose attention amid their trials had become too much diverted from the object of the saints' faith and hope, and who were thus tenderly commended to a renewed increasing attention thereto: "Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope." And may the God of life, peace, and all heavenly consolations be with the mourners in Zion, comfort, console, and raise up their drooping spirits on the wings of

faith and love, over all the overwhelming waves of the trials of time, and finally introduce their tribulated spirits into the haven of rest.

And you my beloved friends, fellow labourers in the gospel and heirs of the same hope, whether as ministering spirits in word and doctrine, sent forth as servants of them who through obedience shall be heirs of salvation; or whether, as angels of the churches, ye fill the important stations of elders and overseers, or in whatever department may be your work and service in the church of God, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and strengthen each others hands in the work of our day: a day in which the great Head of the church is "riding in his excellency on the sky," and, through the instrumentality of those "whom he will send," is opening to the nations, the excellency of the doctrines of the Gospel dispensation. And it is very important that the living members of the body of Christ, be clothed with his spirit, even with the "whole armour of light;" for as the members of this body clothe themselves with the armour of the darkness of human wisdom, fruits of darkness are the product, and spiritual death the end. Hence the apostacies in former ages and churches, and hence the deep degeneracy of ours.

Another fruitful source of disease, and because of which great weakness has prevailed and is prevailing, is the very ardent pursuit of the good things of this present life. Through an undue attachment to these temporal blessings, the eternal interest of the souls of many, is left as a secondary consideration; and would it not be a cause of discouragement, should this mark of the beast, the love of ease and sensual things, be seen impressed upon the foreheads and in the right hands of such as by their stations are standing in the fore front of the battle. He that maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire, cannot be honoured by

the work of polluted hands. There is great need that many in our society, and some in the first stations, should be awakened to a sense of the purity of that God, about whose altar they are professedly serving, lest through carelessness their hands become defiled, and polluted offerings be offered. "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord."

Jesus reminded his followers of the impossibility of serving God and mammon at the same time. And although we are making a higher profession than any other denomination, yet it is a lamentable truth, that after the example of a people formerly, with all our professed spirituality, we are sacrificing our sons and our daughters to Moloch. And so very numerous are these sacrifices that our borders are exceedingly thinned, and the empire of desolation is already set up over some of our once large and flourishing meetings. These well known evidences of the effects of a worldly spirit, should be timely admitted as warnings to us, my beloved friends, and as renewed incitements to such as are set as watchmen on the walls, faithfully to discharge their duty, that the blood of others be not required at their hands.

And when we take into view the shortness of time, and reflect, that in a few more revolving seasons our conflicts will be over, and that the silence of eternal repose will reign over the present militants, how awfully important it is that our work be going on with the day, and that our lights be so kept burning, that those who are looking towards Zion from the high ways and hedges, may not want for way marks to guide their wandering feet. For truly there are many up and down, like sheep scatterd on the mountains without a shepherd. So outward are the preaching and doctrines among the various denominations,—so much pointing to books, to outward manifetations and offerings, that many sincere minds are at a loss in their inquiries after truth, being

often answered by a multitude of words without the true knowledge, by which the pure counsel of truth is darkened. Come then, my friends and fellow professors of the same holy religion, fellow travellers through a state of probation in which we have been wisely placed, subject to trials and temptations, let us walk in the light of the Lord; so will many shine forth in the kingdom of the Father, as stars of the first magnitude in the firmament of his glory and power.

I now feel a few words of salutation to the rising generation, for the present and eternal well being of whom it has been my lot, for years, often to feel a deep and tender interest. You live in a day of much inquiry, and examination of divers reputed doctrines of the Christian religion. And the more these have been investigated, the more it hath appeared, that the delegated sons and daughters of the morning, faithful valiants in the cause of truth, in the work of real reformation, have fallen short of the standard of perfection in doctrinal truths. And notwithstand ng light has gradually shined over much of the darkness of apostacy, the present is but the twilight of the morning to the militant church, and she still remains to be clothed with many unexperienced doctrines, which, were they true in themselves, are nevertheless false in the mouths of such as know them not. To have a mere *historical or traditinal* belief of God and Christ, and be dead as to living, experimental knowledge, will not give life, but experimentally to *know* God and Christ is life.

It appears that most of the Babel builders of the different ages, have laid the foundation of their religious structures on the experience and testimony of some that have gone before them, and have exercised themselves in systematizing unexperienced doctrines, and in forming them into creeds, which to the superficial observer have the appearance of the true cement of the church of Christ,

yet, wanting its nature, they cannot bind together in permanent harmony. The uniting love of God is the alone durable cement of our religious structures, whether as individuals or churches; as nothing but the grace, wisdom, and power of God can build up in the knowledge of himself. This placed man in Eden, and this alone can preserve him there. This is the salt of the covenant, keeping in sweetness and order the children of peace. Thus is the true church built up of living stones, and bound together by the love of God. These need nothing of human invention with which to rear their building—the work of their own hands they have to cease from—the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, hath become to them a mountain of holiness, hath filled their souls and overcome all earthly mindedness. The language of these has not been confounded, nor their works frustrated; their kingdom has not been left to other people.

Behold, my beloved young friends! see the beauty, permancy, and safety of this structure, this strong hold of the sons and daughters of Zion! Here is the building of God, a house not made with hands; the church of the first born; that city of equal dimensions, the heavenly Jerusalem, descending from God, and lighted by the presence of his own glory.

Under these animating prospects, and having before you the great pattern of perfection, his holy apostles and prophets, and many servants of latter ages, for an example of faithful perseverance through trials and temptations, in keeping the law of your God and the word of his patience you will experience the perfection of beauty, in which God shineth out of Zion, to clothe your spirits, become your invincible armour, and the sun and shield of your day. How clear and forcible is the language of invitation through my soul to you at this time, to "come up hither and behold the

bride the Lamb's wife," the redeemed church, that holy city whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise. The holy, preserving power of God is felt to be round about as walls of salvation, and gratitude to him for his multiplied mercies, are its gates of praise. Come up then, through steps of obedience, to those heavenly mansions prepared for you; and here abiding, your goodness will not be like the goodness of Ephraim, as the morning cloud and early dew that passeth soon away, but as a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, unto many of the house of Israel.

Very near are many of my dear absent friends brought to my feelings at this time, with desires that the aged may be supported by the invisible sustaining arm, in patience through the few tribulated steps appointed them in time, so will an eternal inheritance in a glorious immortality be ere long entered upon. Oh! my endeared friends, hold on your way in faith and fortitude unto the end, as hereby an encouraging testimony will be held forth to your younger brethren and sisters, to the sufficiency of his grace. Greater encouragement hath my soul never witnessed through any outward testimony, than that of the holy, harmless, undefiled lives of dear aged friends, who having overcome the world, have come to an establishment as pillars in his house no more to go out.

May the Lord Almighty strengthen your spirits in every hour of trial and conflict, when that life which is soon to be yours in eternally perceptive possession, may at times be hidden from you. And may those, who are at present animated by the beams of a meridian sun, see that their day's work be going on with passing time. The work of truth and righteousness in the earth is a great work, in which we are called to labour. And may our faithfulness to the light of our day be such, that the men of Ninevah, and the queen of the south, nations or ages of less light and knowledge, may

not rise above us in the scale of obedience, to our condemnation.

Be strong then and labour—yea put on strength, O arm of the Lord! seeing the harvest is great. Ungathered nations are waiting, like ripening harvests, to be gathered from the confusion of all Babel building, the confounded language of all unexperimental doctrines, to the gift and knowledge of God in their own souls. Great is the work of our day, and great our accountability for a faithful discharge of duty, in a declaration of the truths of God, committed to his delegated shepherds for his flock. And if the present promulgators of the gospel, or messengers of God and angels of the churches, are faithful in declaring the messages of his will, and the work of reformation go on, to the redemption of the people from all the doctrines of darkness, from all the vain customs, and from every defilement of this world's spirit, the gentiles will ere long be more generally gathered to the light of the Lord, and kings to the brightness of its rising; the desolating sword of contending nations will be sheathed in peace, and the kingdom of the Messiah set up over the "abomination of desolation," which not only prevails in remote regions, but is still waving its banners over the enlightened nations of Christendom. May the Lord cut short the work in righteousness, in the restitution of all things that the state of the nations can bear, that the darkness of superstition and traditional religion may be dispelled, and the light of truth shine forth over all nations, as the morning beams of another "day of the son of man."

JOHN MOTT.

Rensselaerville, N. Y. 12 Mo. 21st. 1827.